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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC//DDI/OEA//
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//FPA//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DB-Z//
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0616
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7050
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7109
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 1604
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5427
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 4357
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 7570
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1843
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3146
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SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; December 15, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo

Presidential Economic Aide Kang Man-soo: "ROKG will Work Out Rescue Plans for Companies Suffering Cash Flow Problems"

JoongAng Ilbo

National Assembly under Criticism for "Dereliction of Duty"

Dong-a Ilbo

Ruling and Opposition Parties Agree to Revise Political Reform-Related Laws

Hankook Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun

ROKG to Expand Nursing Assistance for Patients Next Year

Hankyoreh Shinmun

Ruling Party, Conservative Media Suspected of Plotting to Give Special Treatment to Comprehensive Program Channels

Segye Ilbo

ROKG Seeks to Extend Retirement Age of Rapidly Aging Baby Boomers

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

According to Thailand's newspaper, The Nation, the pilot of a cargo plane recently detained in Thailand for allegedly carrying weapons from North Korea told interrogators that he transported similar consignments three or four times before. (Chosun, Dong-a, KBS)

According to Thai and foreign media outlets, some of the cargo on the seized aircraft was slated to be offloaded in Sri Lanka and the Middle East. (Chosun, Dong-a, Hankook, Hankyoreh, Seoul, KBS)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

-N. Korea

The Dec. 12 seizure in Thailand of a Georgian cargo plane carrying some 35 tons of North Korean weapons continued to capture the attention of the ROK media.

Most media noted Dec. 14 reports by Thai and foreign media outlets quoting the pilot on the seized aircraft as telling interrogators that he transported similar consignments three or four times before. The other crew members in police detention were also quoted as saying that the plane "was to stop for refueling in Bangkok and drop off some of the cargo in Sri Lanka and the Middle East before returning to Ukraine," (the alleged final destination of the plane).

The media interpreted these statements as indicating the possibility that North Korean weapons might have flowed out of the country several times via cargo planes.

An inside-page report in conservative Dong-a Ilbo claimed: "The 'military economy,' or efforts by North Korean military agencies to raise income, has been separate from North Korea's regular economy since the 1970s. ... The large amount of dollars earned by the military economy has been (used to maintain the regime) of leader Kim Jong-il."

Moderate Hankook Ilbo editorialized: "If North Korea, which has made no response yet, protests by calling (the seizure) another sanction or provocation, it will inevitably dampen U.S.-North Korea dialogue.

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Should the ongoing investigation prove that North Korea has engaged in arms deals with terrorist organizations, it will further complicate the situation. ... Once North Korea clearly understands the difficulty in earning foreign currency by exporting weapons in violation of UN Security Council sanctions, this may have a positive effect on resuming the Six-Party Talks. The North should realize that it will no longer be able to survive amid international sanctions and come to the negotiating table."

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

1N. KOREA SHOULD STOP ILLEGAL WEAPONS EXPORTS
(Hankook Ilbo, December 15, 2009, Page 39)

The detention of a Georgian-flagged plane carrying North Korean-made weapons at a Thai airport is causing serious repercussions. Thai authorities seized about 35 tons of weaponry, including ground-to-air missiles, aboard the cargo plane, and arrested the five crew members of the plane, including the pilot, on a charge of illegal arms possession. This step was taken under the Thai domestic law and UN Security Council Resolution 1874. It is regrettable that this incident took place when U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth's recent visit to Pyongyang is raising expectations for progress on discussions about the resumption of the Six-Party Talks and a peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula.

The cargo plane was reportedly detained at the request of the U.S. intelligence authorities. The U.S. clearly showed its intention not to ease pressure against the North while pursuing dialogue with the communist state at the same time. In early August, North Korean-made weapons on board a Bahamian vessel were seized, and in June, a North Korean ship suspected of carrying weapons toward Myanmar returned home after being tracked by a U.S. Navy vessel. This is the first time that North Korea was caught exporting weapons by airplane. It will be hard for North Korea to export weapons either by ship or air because the U.S. keeps close watch (on the North's move) and international cooperation intensifies.

If North Korea, which has made no response yet, protests by calling (the seizure) another sanction or provocation, it will inevitably dampen U.S.-North Korea dialogue. Should the ongoing investigation prove that North Korea has engaged in arms deals with terrorist organizations, it will further complicate the situation. However,

if North Korea has sold conventional weapons, it will have little impact on U.S.-North Korea talks. Once North Korea clearly understands the difficulty in earning foreign currency by exporting weapons in violation of UN Security Council sanctions, this may have a positive effect on resuming the Six-Party Talks. The North should realize that it will no longer be able to survive amid international sanctions and come to the negotiating table.

The U.S. and the international community need to take a two-track strategy wisely in order to make the North abandon its weapons of mass destruction and join the international community. If (the U.S. and the international community) push too hard on North Korea as they did in the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) incident, it will again lead to a delay in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.

STEPHENS